THE AMAZING
SPIDER-MAN
MARVEL
521
STRACZYNSKI
DEODATO JR
PIMENTEL
PALMER
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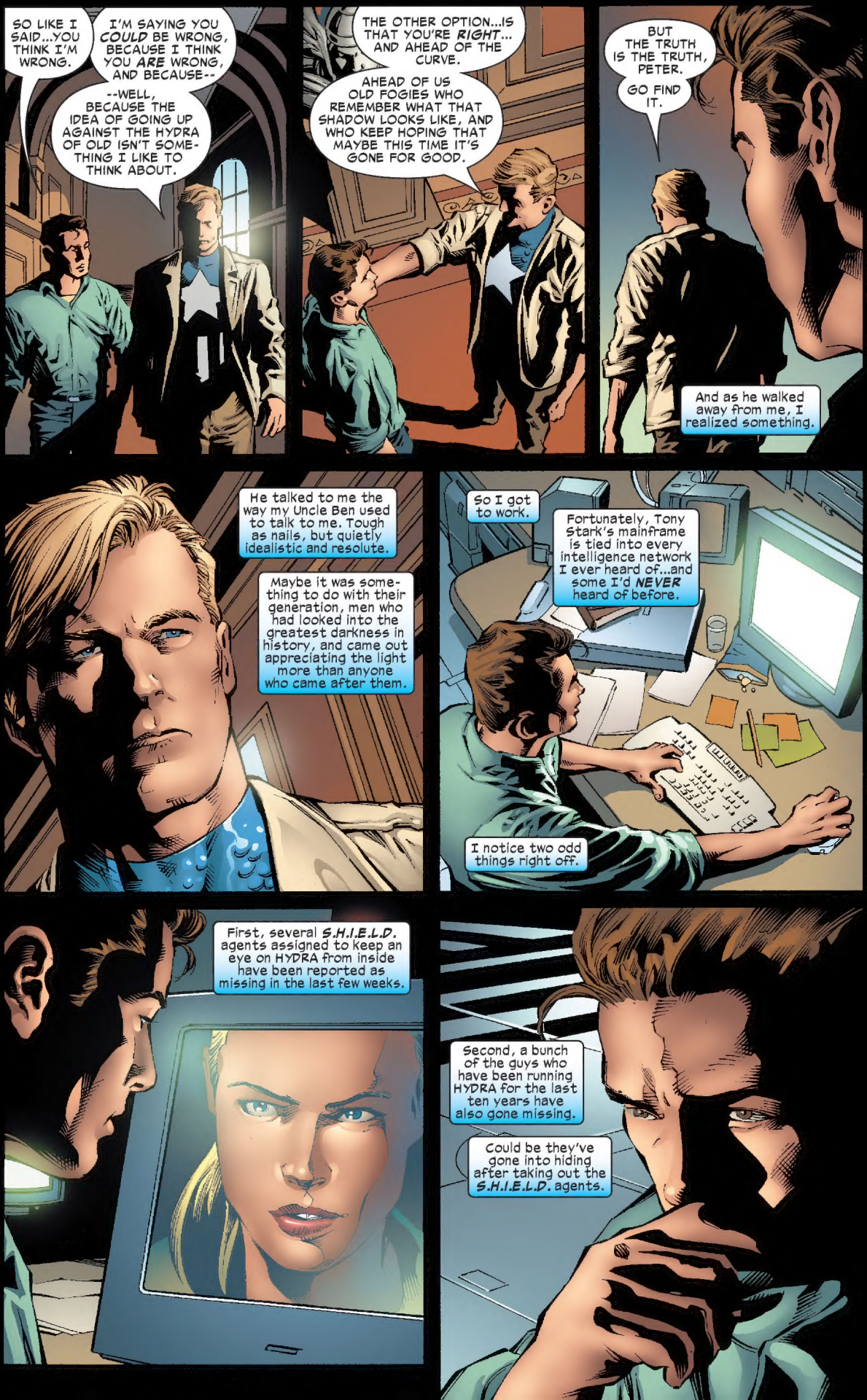
Four simultaneous attacks by powered guys with HYDRA insignia and an uncanny resemblance to members of the Avengers, past and present.
In each case, the good guys drove off the bad guys.
Some might call that a victory.
I call it a diversion. A feint.
A set-up, designed to make us think we were dealing with a series of ill-planned robberies, when in fact it was an expertly timed maneuver to divert attention from their efforts to smuggle something into the country.

The problem is figuring out what the heck it all means before it's too late, and convincing the others that I'm right...especially since I'm still the new kid on the block around here.
Because guys like Steve Rogers, Captain America...he's seen it all, and you've really got to have your game on if you're going to play in his playground.
SO YOU'RE SAYING YOU DON'T BELIEVE ME?
I'M SAYING... THAT FOR THE LAST TEN YEARS, HYDRA HAS BEEN JUST ONE MORE CRIME CARTEL. IT HASN'T BEEN NEARLY THE THREAT IT USED TO BE.
"AFTER THE SECOND WORLD WAR, WHEN IT WAS AN OUTGROWTH OF THE SUPREMACIST IDEALS OF THE NAZIS, HYDRA WAS A REAL THREAT TO THE WORLD.
"BECAUSE PEOPLE WHO ONLY CARE ABOUT MONEY CAN BE BOUGHT OUT... PEOPLE WHO CARE ONLY ABOUT POWER CAN BE BROKEN, OR SCARED AWAY.
"BUT EXTREMISTS WHO GENUINELY BELIEVE THAT THEIR CAUSE IS JUST...THOSE ARE THE ONES TO WATCH OUT FOR.
"BECAUSE THEY WOULD SOONER DESTROY THE WORLD THAN LET IT BECOME SOMETHING THEY DON'T LIKE."


SO LIKE I SAID...YOU THINK I'M WRONG.
I'M SAYING YOU COULD BE WRONG, BECAUSE I THINK YOU ARE WRONG, AND BECAUSE--
--WELL, BECAUSE THE IDEA OF GOING UP AGAINST THE HYDRA OF OLD ISN'T SOMETHING I LIKE TO THINK ABOUT.
THE OTHER OPTION...IS THAT YOU'RE RIGHT... AND AHEAD OF THE CURVE.
AHEAD OF US OLD FOGIES WHO REMEMBER WHAT THAT SHADOW LOOKS LIKE, AND WHO KEEP HOPING THAT MAYBE THIS TIME IT'S GONE FOR GOOD.
BUT THE TRUTH IS THE TRUTH, PETER.
GO FIND IT.
And as he walked away from me, I realized something.
He talked to me the way my Uncle Ben used to talk to me. Tough as nails, but quietly idealistic and resolute.
Maybe it was something to do with their generation, men who had looked into the greatest darkness in history, and came out appreciating the light more than anyone who came after them.
So I got to work.
Fortunately, Tony Stark's mainframe is tied into every intelligence network I ever heard of...and some I'd NEVER heard of before.
I notice two odd things right off.
First, several S.H.I.E.L.D. agents assigned to keep an eye on HYDRA from inside have been reported as missing in the last few weeks.
Second, a bunch of the guys who have been running HYDRA for the last ten years have also gone missing.
Could be they've gone into hiding after taking out the S.H.I.E.L.D. agents.

Then I remember what Steve said about how the worst of these guys were true believers in Nazi ideals and traditions...and another possibility comes to mind.
Hitler rose to power on the backs of a bunch of brown-shirted thugs called the SA, who were mainly interested in beating and intimidating people, and using crime to increase the power and bank accounts of the big guys.
But as soon as Hitler had what he needed, he got rid of the SA and replaced them with the SS...who were true believers when it came to the big picture.
Maybe that's what happened here. Why else would they all just vanish like that right before launching a campaign bigger than anything HYDRA's done lately?
Have they been replaced by guys who believe in the big picture?
And if I'm right... then what IS the big picture?
It's a question I'd like to pursue in more detail--
--but I have places to be and promises to keep. And for this particular promise--

--I have no intention of being late.
A NEW PLAY BY FETTES GRAY
"CATS ALWAYS LIE"
"CATS ALWAYS LIE"

ARE THERE PEOPLE OUT THERE?
LOTS OF THEM?
YES.
MORE THAN TWO?
DEFINE LOTS.
YES.

YOU'LL BE FINE, MJ. DON'T WORRY.
I'M NOT WORRIED.
SO HOW MANY TIMES THROWING UP BEFORE OPENING NIGHT IS TOO MANY?
SIX.
OKAY, GOOD, THAT MEANS I HAVE TWO TO GO.
MJ?

THESE ARE FOR YOU...FROM SOME GUY IN THE FIRST ROW.

"MJ...WE WIN THE SECOND WE DECIDE TO TRY. JUST SHOWING UP IS VICTORY.
"YOU'VE ALREADY WON. SO JUST HAVE FUN, AND KNOCK 'EM OUT.
"I LOVE YOU. P."

YOU OKAY, MJ?
YEAH, TANYA, I'M FINE...

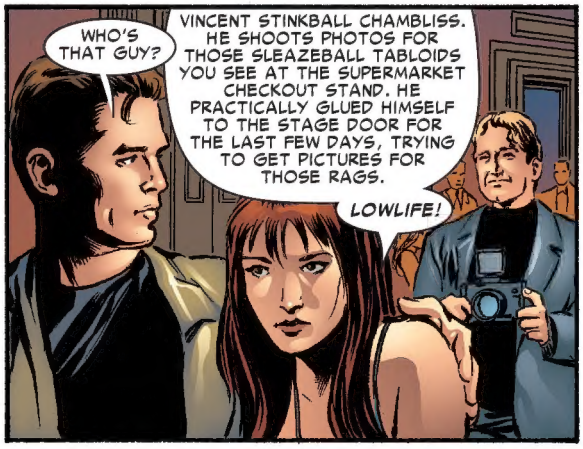
...I'M GOING TO BE JUST FINE.

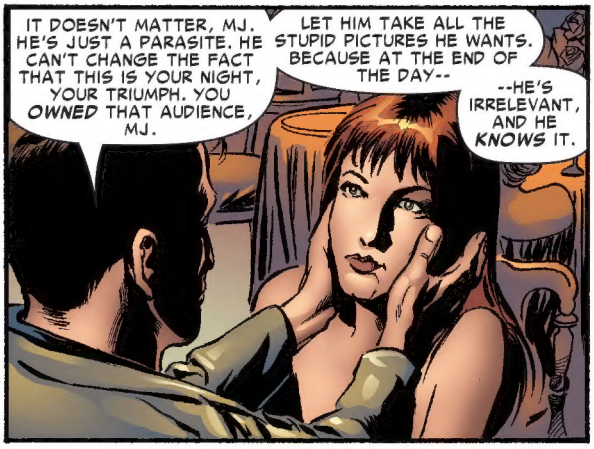
When you live with someone day after day, it's easy to forget sometimes who they really are, and what they can do.
Then when you see it, when you're reminded just what they can do...it's a revelation.
People see me swinging around skyscrapers and they think I'm pretty special.
But it's not me.
It's her.
It's always been her.

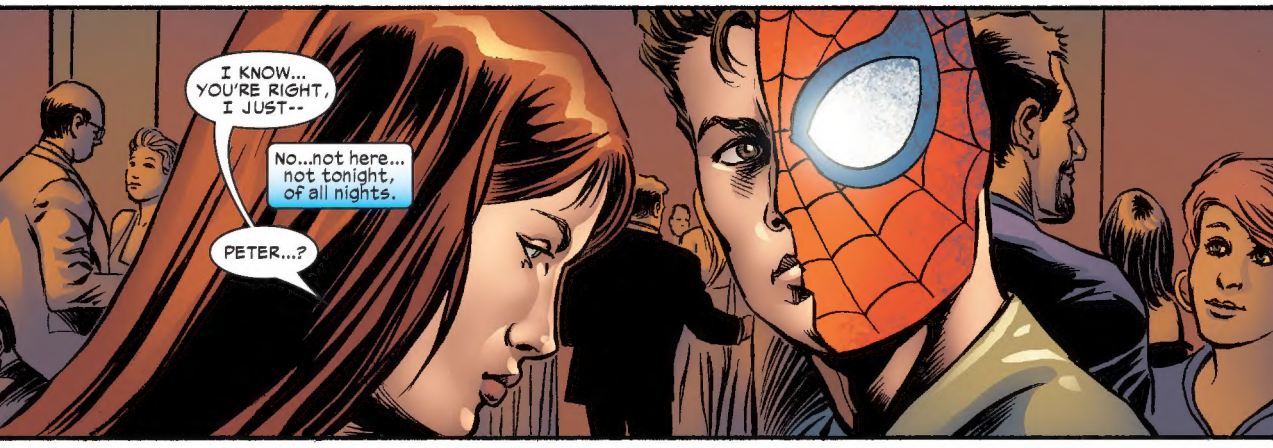
And at the after-party, every eye is on her...and I know that I'm the luckiest guy on the face of the planet.
PETER--
YEAH?
CAN I SAY SOME-THING?
SURE, SWEETIE, ANYTHING. WHAT IS IT?
WOO-HOO!
I LOVE YOU, PETER.
I LOVE YOU TOO, MJ.
I DON'T THINK SO.
I LOVE YOU MORE.
GIVE ME TWO MINUTES AND I'LL PROVE IT...
HOLD THAT POSE--

PERFECT!
HEY!

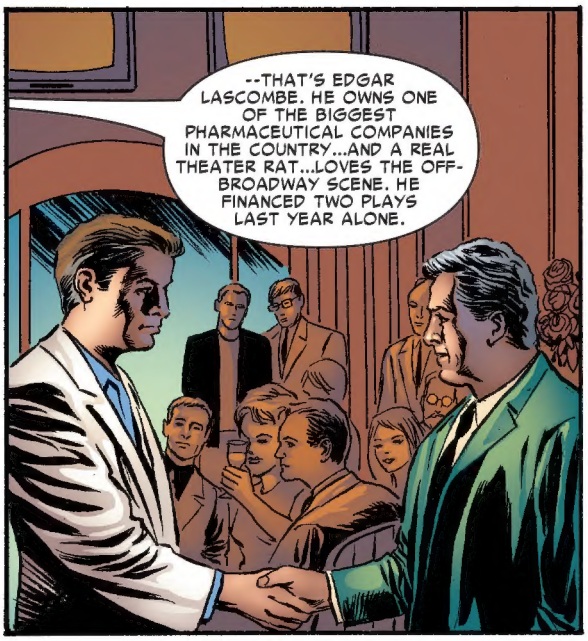
HOW'D YOU GET IN HERE, CHAMBLISS?
PRESS PASS. REAL SIMPLE. HOW ABOUT A SMILE, MJ?
I'LL GIVE YOU A--
MJ... THROTTLE BACK...


WHO'S THAT GUY?
VINCENT STINKBALL CHAMBLISS. HE SHOOTS PHOTOS FOR THOSE SLEAZEBALL TABLOIDS YOU SEE AT THE SUPERMARKET CHECKOUT STAND. HE PRACTICALLY GLUED HIMSELF TO THE STAGE DOOR FOR THE LAST FEW DAYS, TRYING TO GET PICTURES FOR THOSE RAGS.
LOWLIFE!


IT DOESN'T MATTER, MJ. HE'S JUST A PARASITE. HE CAN'T CHANGE THE FACT THAT THIS IS YOUR NIGHT, YOUR TRIUMPH. YOU OWNED THAT AUDIENCE, MJ.
LET HIM TAKE ALL THE STUPID PICTURES HE WANTS. BECAUSE AT THE END OF THE DAY--
--HE'S IRRELEVANT, AND HE KNOWS IT.

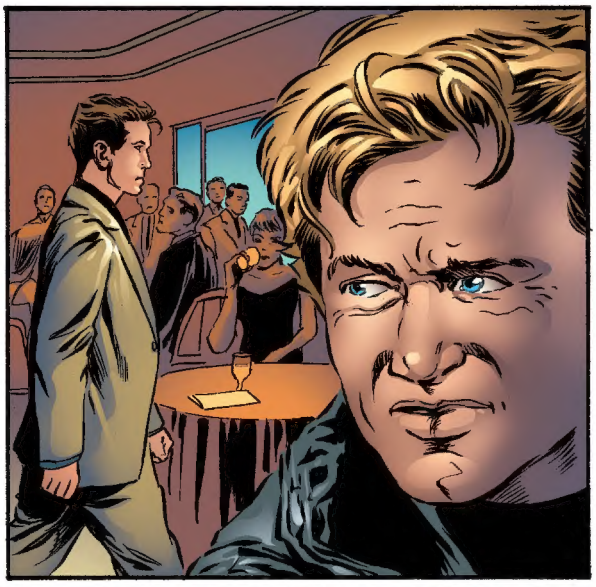

I KNOW... YOU'RE RIGHT, I JUST--
No...not here... not tonight, of all nights.
PETER...?

MJ...THOSE TWO GUYS...THE OLDER MAN, AND THE ONE WATCHING HIM LIKE A HAWK...WHO ARE THEY?
THE GUY IN THE BACK...I DON'T KNOW, I NEVER SAW HIM BEFORE.
BUT THE GUY IN FRONT--


--THAT'S EDGAR LASCOMBE. HE OWNS ONE OF THE BIGGEST PHARMACEUTICAL COMPANIES IN THE COUNTRY...AND A REAL THEATER RAT...LOVES THE OFF-BROADWAY SCENE. HE FINANCED TWO PLAYS LAST YEAR ALONE.

WHY?
I DON'T KNOW, BUT--
LET ME GUESS...YOUR YOU-KNOW-WHAT IS TINGLING.
YEAH.
AND I GOT A WEIRD FEELING ABOUT THAT GUY, TOO.

I HAVE TO--
I'M SORRY.
I KNOW.
IT'S OKAY... THIS IS MY NIGHT, REMEMBER? I'M IN MY ELEMENT.
YOU GO GET INTO YOURS.



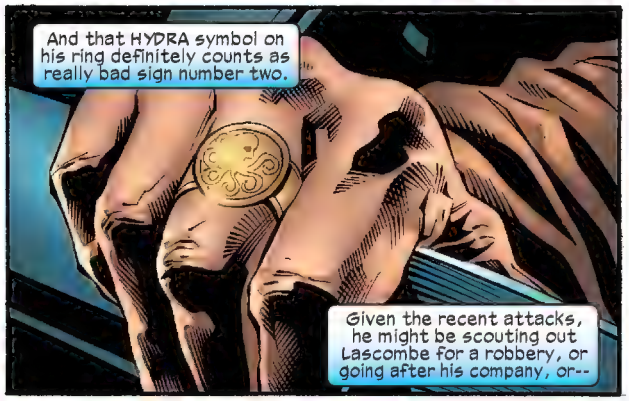
NUTS... MISSED THEM.
DO YOU NEED YOUR CAR, SIR?
NO, THAT'S OKAY--

"--I'LL JUST CATCH A LIFT."
I don't understand why my spider-sense is working overtime on this, but it's never led me astray yet.

Well, except that time it told me there was something wrong in the girl's locker room back in high school.

At least, that's how I chose to INTERPRET it, anyway.
End of the line, let's see where this goes.

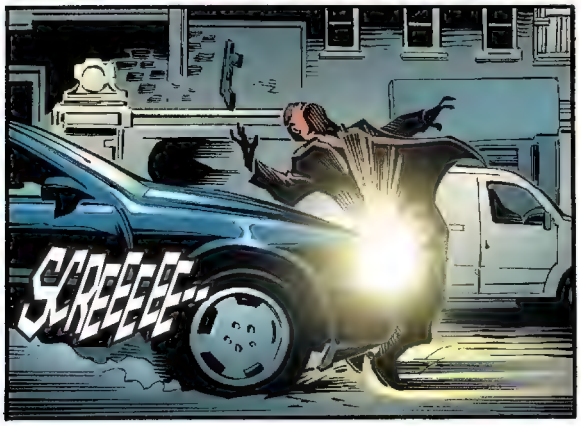
Okay, bad sign number one on display.


And that HYDRA symbol on his ring definitely counts as really bad sign number two.
Given the recent attacks, he might be scouting out Lascombe for a robbery, or going after his company, or--

HSSSSS
HEY KITTY... NICE KITTY...SHHHHH... WHAT'S WRONG? NEVER SEEN A SIX-FOOT-TALL HUMANOID SPIDER BEFORE?
RROWWR!
NO!
CRASH
UMMMMM... HI.
LISTEN, DO YOU KNOW IF THE 425 BUS GOING UPTOWN STOPS HERE?
BRRRRRRRRP!
HAIL HYDRA!
YOU KNOW, YOU GUYS HAVE GOT TO GET SOME NEW MATERIAL.

Moves fast for a little guy. Got to draw his fire then take him out quick, before one of those bullets goes through a window. Shouldn't be hard.
HEY, OVER HERE! C'MON, YOU CALL THAT GUNPLAY? YOUR MOM TEACH YOU HOW TO USE THAT OR SOMETHING?
Perfect, now to--

NO!
WHAT--


SCREEEEE--

MA'AM, ARE YOU--
...OHMYGOD... OHMYGOD...
IT'S OKAY, IT WASN'T YOUR FAULT--
I CAN CONFIRM THAT.

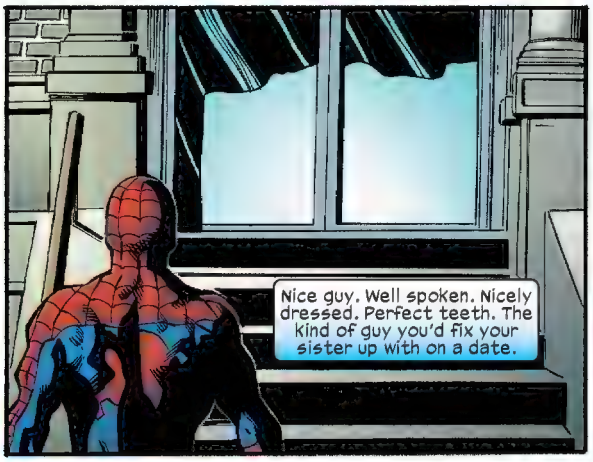
I SAW THE WHOLE THING, MISS. YOU HAD NO WAY OF STOPPING IN TIME. AND UNLIKE THIS FELLOW, I CAN TESTIFY TO THAT EFFECT IN OPEN COURT.
AS FOR YOU...WELL, I THINK YOU MAY HAVE SAVED MY LIFE. AT THE COST OF HIS OWN, IT WOULD SEEM. HOWEVER--

--IT'S PROBABLY BEST TO GET AN AMBULANCE HERE AS FAST AS POSSIBLE, JUST TO MAKE SURE EVERY-THING'S COVERED.
...OHMYGOD... OHMYGOD... OHYMGOD...

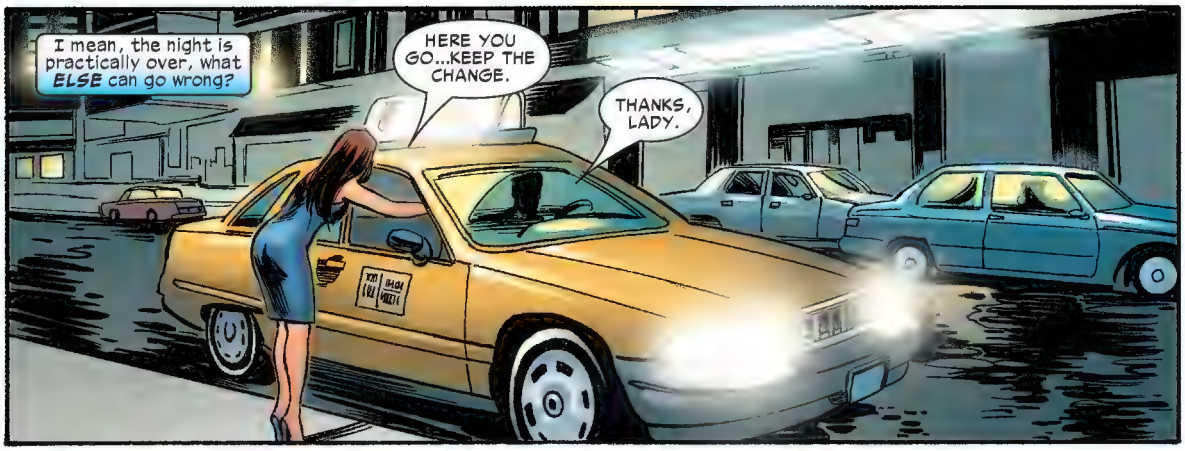
...OHMYGOD... OHMYGOD... OHYMGOD...
I SHOULD'VE MOVED FASTER. EVEN A SECOND--
THEY DID EVERYTHING THEY COULD. AND SO DID YOU...ESPECIALLY CONSIDERING THAT HE WAS SHOOTING AT YOU.
NYC EMS
AMBULANCE

ANY IDEA WHY HE WAS AFTER YOU?
NOT REALLY. THERE ARE ALWAYS THREATS OUT THERE... KIDNAPPERS IN SEARCH OF RANSOM, INDUSTRIAL THIEVES, AND PETTY ONES...BUT BEYOND THAT, NO IDEA, NO.
WHATEVER HIS REASONS, THEY DIED WITH HIM.

REGARDLESS, GIVEN THE WAY HE WAS ARMED, IT WOULD'VE GONE BADLY FOR ME. SO THANK YOU AGAIN FOR BEING IN THE RIGHT PLACE AT THE RIGHT TIME.
SURE. JUST PART OF THE SERVICE.

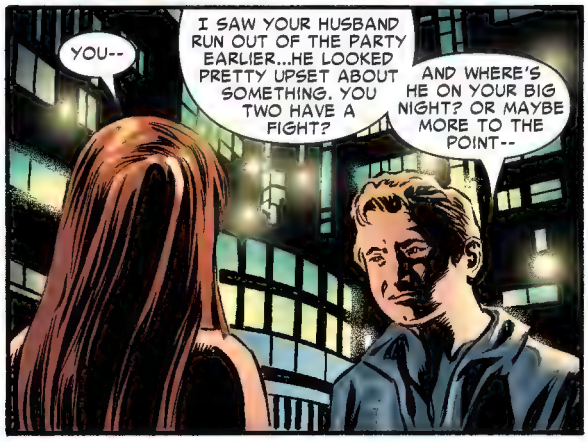

Nice guy. Well spoken. Nicely dressed. Perfect teeth. The kind of guy you'd fix your sister up with on a date.

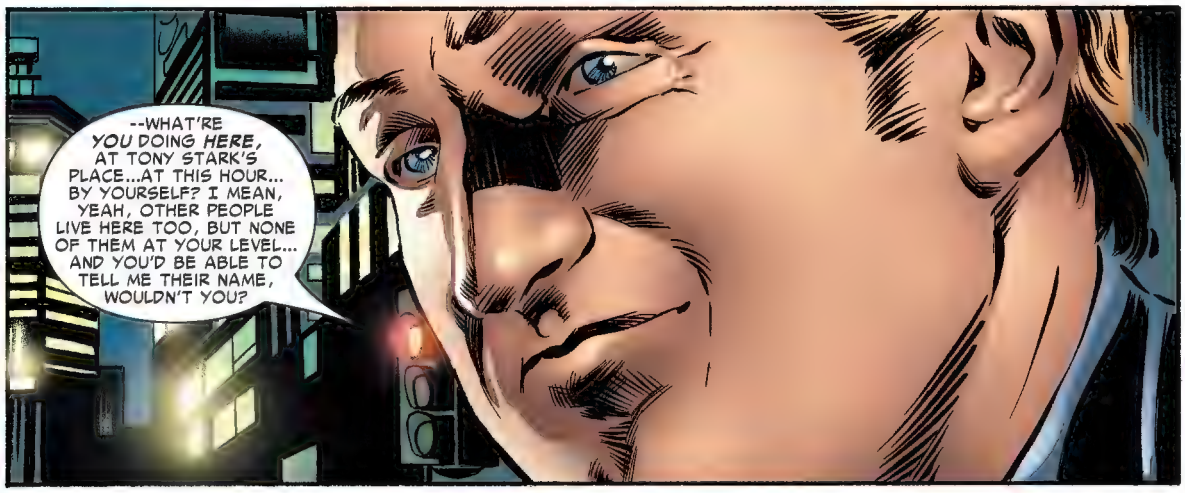
So why the heck is my spider-sense still ringing like a phone off the hook when there shouldn't be anything else to worry about?

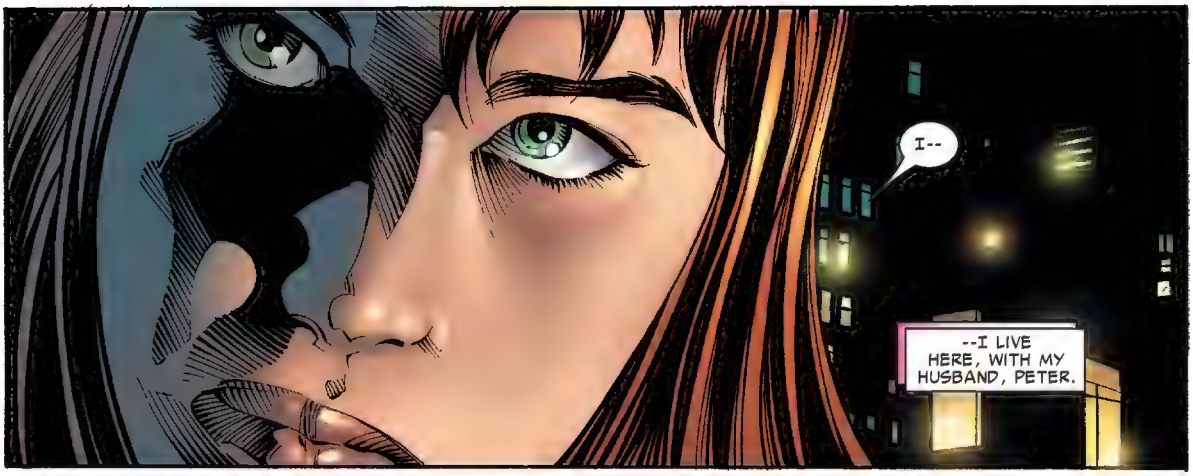

I mean, the night is practically over, what ELSE can go wrong?
HERE YOU GO...KEEP THE CHANGE.
THANKS, LADY.

HEY... MJ!

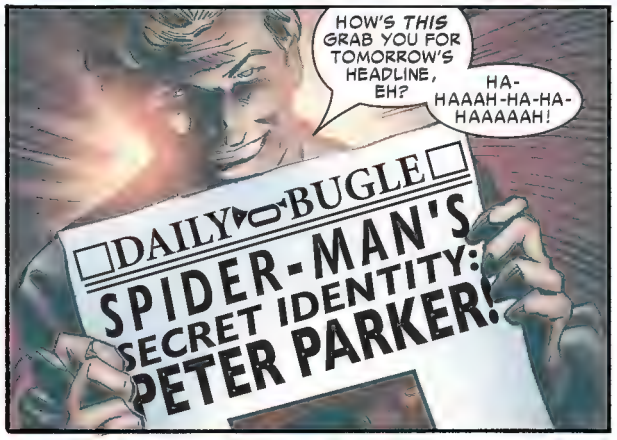
SMILE!


YOU--
I SAW YOUR HUSBAND RUN OUT OF THE PARTY EARLIER...HE LOOKED PRETTY UPSET ABOUT SOMETHING. YOU TWO HAVE A FIGHT?
AND WHERE'S HE ON YOUR BIG NIGHT? OR MAYBE MORE TO THE POINT--

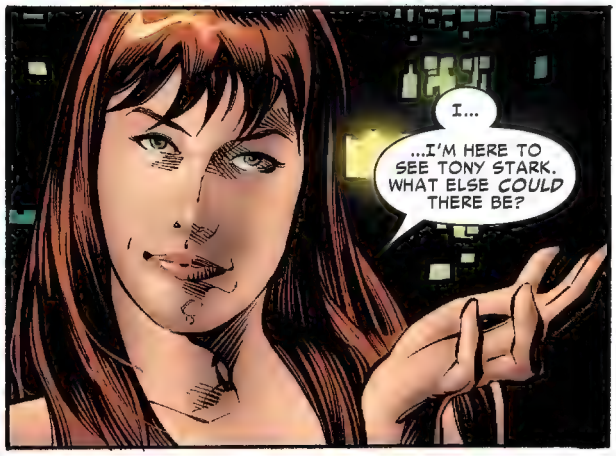

--WHAT'RE YOU DOING HERE, AT TONY STARK'S PLACE...AT THIS HOUR... BY YOURSELF? I MEAN, YEAH, OTHER PEOPLE LIVE HERE TOO, BUT NONE OF THEM AT YOUR LEVEL... AND YOU'D BE ABLE TO TELL ME THEIR NAME, WOULDN'T YOU?


I--
--I LIVE HERE, WITH MY HUSBAND, PETER.

YOUR HUSBAND CAN AFFORD TO LIVE HERE?
WELL, NO, I...TONY LETS US LIVE HERE FREE.
REALLY? SEE, I GOT MY SOURCES THAT A LOT OF INTERESTING PEOPLE HAVE BEEN SEEN GOING IN AND OUT OF THERE. HERO-TYPES.


HOW'S THIS GRAB YOU FOR TOMORROW'S HEADLINE, EH?
HA-HAAAH-HA-HA-HAAAAAH!
DAILY BUGLE
SPIDER-MAN'S SECRET IDENTITY: PETER PARKER!

MJ?
I SAID... WHAT'RE YOU DOING HERE AT THIS HOUR?

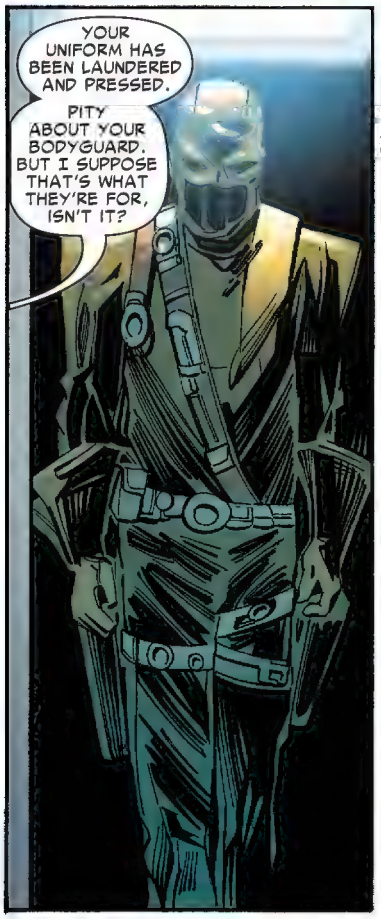

I...
...I'M HERE TO SEE TONY STARK. WHAT ELSE COULD THERE BE?

YEAH... WHAT ELSE INDEED?
"I HEARD WHAT HAPPENED, SIR. BAD NIGHT?"

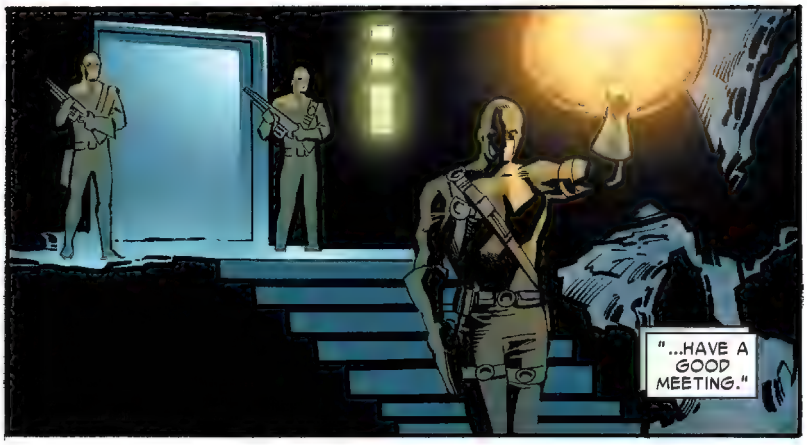
YES. IT WAS A VERY CLOSE CALL.
A BIT OF BOTHER IN THE STREET, AS WE SAY.
VERY MUCH IN THE STREET, YES.

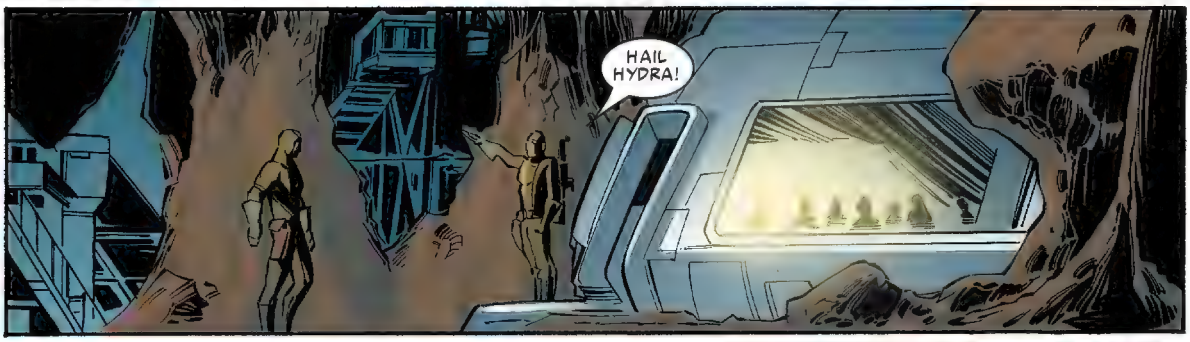
WILL YOU BE REQUIRING ANYTHING ELSE TONIGHT, MR. LASCOMBE?
VERY GOOD, SIR.
NO, ROBERT, THANKS. YOU SHOULD GET SOME SLEEP.

OH, AND SIR?
YES, ROBERT?

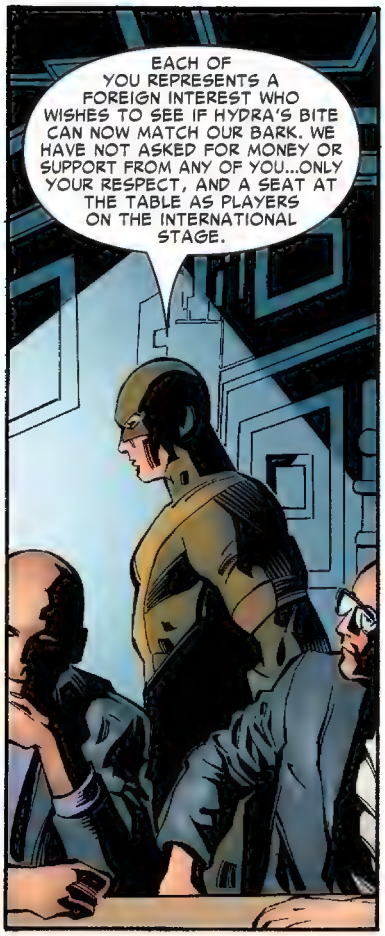

YOUR UNIFORM HAS BEEN LAUNDERED AND PRESSED.
PITY ABOUT YOUR BODYGUARD. BUT I SUPPOSE THAT'S WHAT THEY'RE FOR, ISN'T IT?

YES...YES, IT IS, ROBERT. GOOD NIGHT.
GOOD NIGHT, SIR...


"...HAVE A GOOD MEETING."

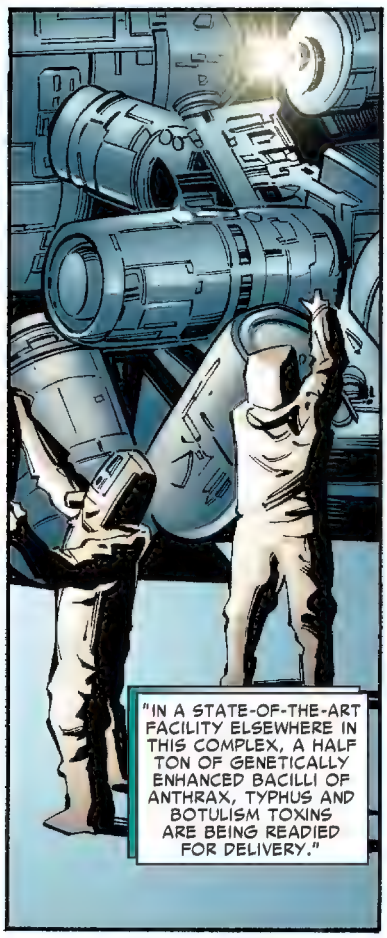

HAIL HYDRA!

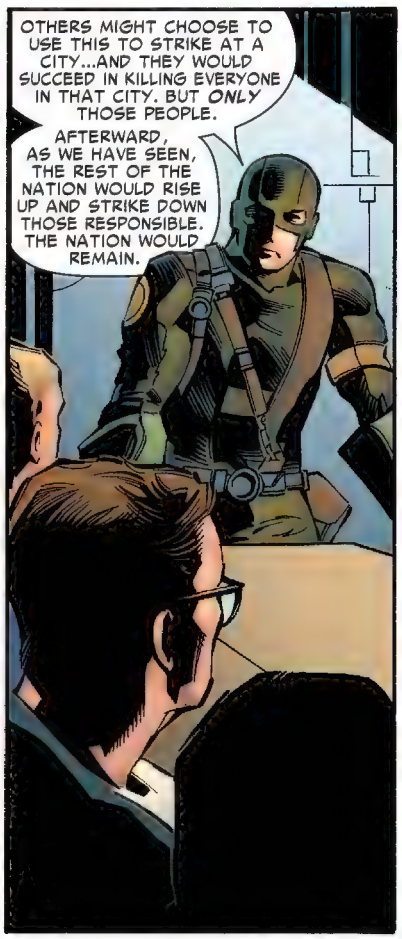
THANK YOU FOR WAITING, GENTLEMEN. I HAD A FEW THINGS TO DEAL WITH TOPSIDE.
YOU'VE BEEN VERY PATIENT, SO I WON'T WASTE ANY MORE OF YOUR TIME WITH PLEASANTRIES.

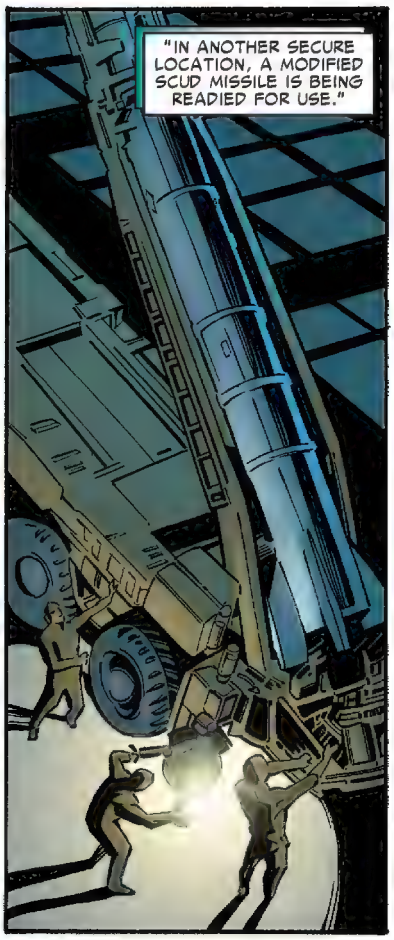

EACH OF YOU REPRESENTS A FOREIGN INTEREST WHO WISHES TO SEE IF HYDRA'S BITE CAN NOW MATCH OUR BARK. WE HAVE NOT ASKED FOR MONEY OR SUPPORT FROM ANY OF YOU...ONLY YOUR RESPECT, AND A SEAT AT THE TABLE AS PLAYERS ON THE INTERNATIONAL STAGE.

YOU'VE ALL BEEN FIGHTING A WAR OF ATTRITION AGAINST THE WEST. A LITTLE VICTORY HERE, A STALEMATE THERE... WE ARE TRYING A DIFFERENT WAY. WE ARE GOING TO ANSWER A SEEMINGLY IMPOSSIBLE QUESTION.
AND THAT QUESTION IS THIS:

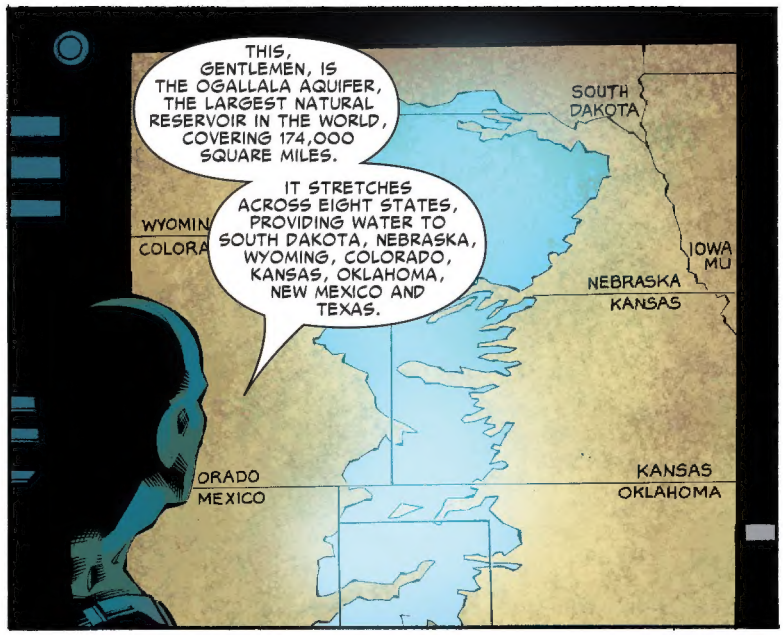
HOW DO YOU KILL A COUNTRY?
NOT SO MUCH KILL ALL ITS PEOPLE...THOUGH MANY WILL PERISH IN THIS... HOW DO YOU KILL THE NATION *ITSELF?*

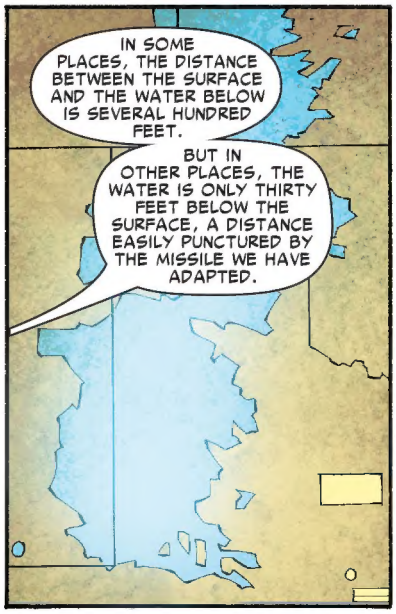

"IN A STATE-OF-THE-ART FACILITY ELSEWHERE IN THIS COMPLEX, A HALF TON OF GENETICALLY ENHANCED BACILLI OF ANTHRAX, TYPHUS AND BOTULISM TOXINS ARE BEING READIED FOR DELIVERY."

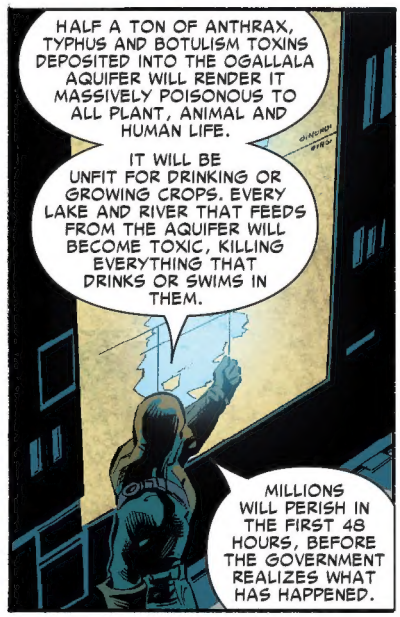

OTHERS MIGHT CHOOSE TO USE THIS TO STRIKE AT A CITY...AND THEY WOULD SUCCEED IN KILLING EVERYONE IN THAT CITY. BUT *ONLY* THOSE PEOPLE.
AFTERWARD, AS WE HAVE SEEN, THE REST OF THE NATION WOULD RISE UP AND STRIKE DOWN THOSE RESPONSIBLE. THE NATION WOULD REMAIN.

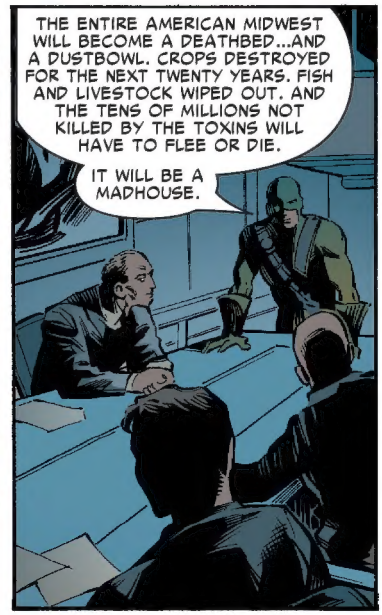

"IN ANOTHER SECURE LOCATION, A MODIFIED SCUD MISSILE IS BEING READIED FOR USE."

OTHERS WOULD LOAD UP SUCH A MISSILE WITH EXPLOSIVES, TO STRIKE AN IMPORTANT TARGET. BUT WE ARE DOING SOMETHING VERY, VERY DIFFERENT.


THIS, GENTLEMEN, IS THE OGALLALA AQUIFER, THE LARGEST NATURAL RESERVOIR IN THE WORLD, COVERING 174,000 SQUARE MILES.
IT STRETCHES ACROSS EIGHT STATES, PROVIDING WATER TO SOUTH DAKOTA, NEBRASKA, WYOMING, COLORADO, KANSAS, OKLAHOMA, NEW MEXICO AND TEXAS.
SOUTH DAKOTA
WYOMIN
COLORA
IOWA
MU
NEBRASKA
KANSAS
ORADO
MEXICO
KANSAS
OKLAHOMA


IN SOME PLACES, THE DISTANCE BETWEEN THE SURFACE AND THE WATER BELOW IS SEVERAL HUNDRED FEET.
BUT IN OTHER PLACES, THE WATER IS ONLY THIRTY FEET BELOW THE SURFACE, A DISTANCE EASILY PUNCTURED BY THE MISSILE WE HAVE ADAPTED.


HALF A TON OF ANTHRAX, TYPHUS AND BOTULISM TOXINS DEPOSITED INTO THE OGALLALA AQUIFER WILL RENDER IT MASSIVELY POISONOUS TO ALL PLANT, ANIMAL AND HUMAN LIFE.
IT WILL BE UNFIT FOR DRINKING OR GROWING CROPS. EVERY LAKE AND RIVER THAT FEEDS FROM THE AQUIFER WILL BECOME TOXIC, KILLING EVERYTHING THAT DRINKS OR SWIMS IN THEM.
MILLIONS WILL PERISH IN THE FIRST 48 HOURS, BEFORE THE GOVERNMENT REALIZES WHAT HAS HAPPENED.


THE ENTIRE AMERICAN MIDWEST WILL BECOME A DEATHBED...AND A DUSTBOWL. CROPS DESTROYED FOR THE NEXT TWENTY YEARS. FISH AND LIVESTOCK WIPED OUT. AND THE TENS OF MILLIONS NOT KILLED BY THE TOXINS WILL HAVE TO FLEE OR DIE.
IT WILL BE A MADHOUSE.

THE NATION WILL STARVE, BORDERS WILL BE OVERRUN, AND THE ECONOMY WILL COLLAPSE. EIGHT STATES WILL BE UNLIVEABLE, CAUSING MILLIONS OF PANICKED PEOPLE TO FLOOD INTO OTHER STATES. THE NATION WILL BE IN CHAOS: PARALYZED, UNGOVERNABLE, AND UNABLE TO STRIKE BACK.

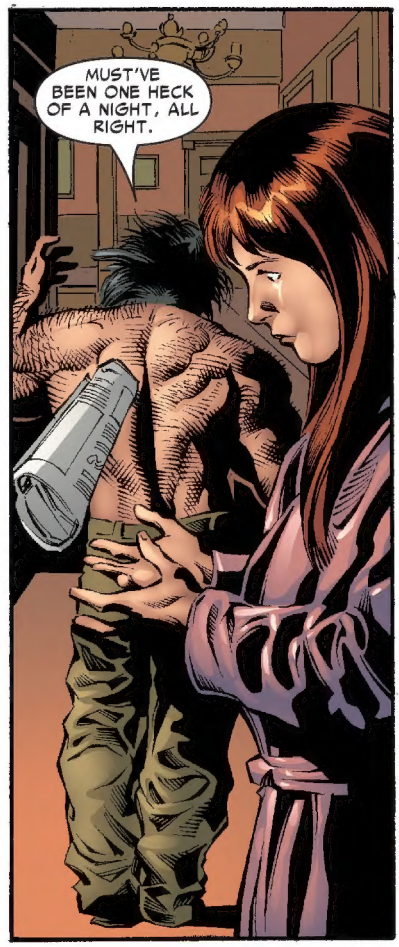
THAT, GENTLEMEN, IS HOW YOU KILL A COUNTRY. AND *THAT* IS *EXACTLY* WHAT IS GOING TO HAPPEN IN JUST A FEW DAYS TIME.
ANY QUESTIONS?

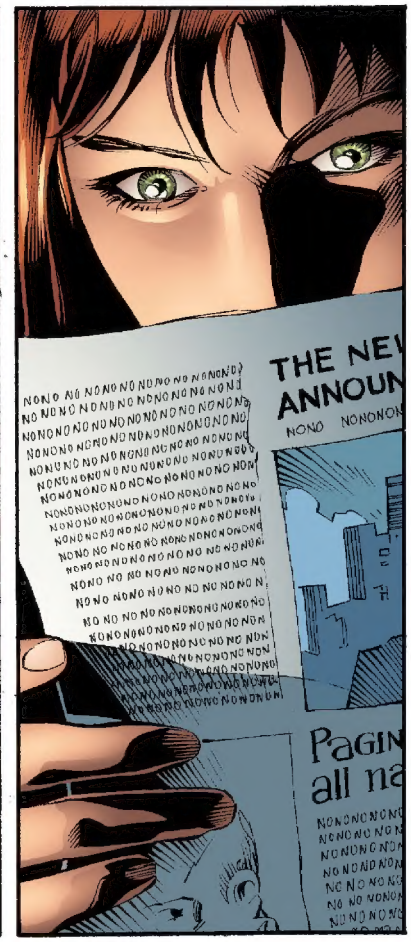
MJ? YOU AWAKE, BABY?
MJ?

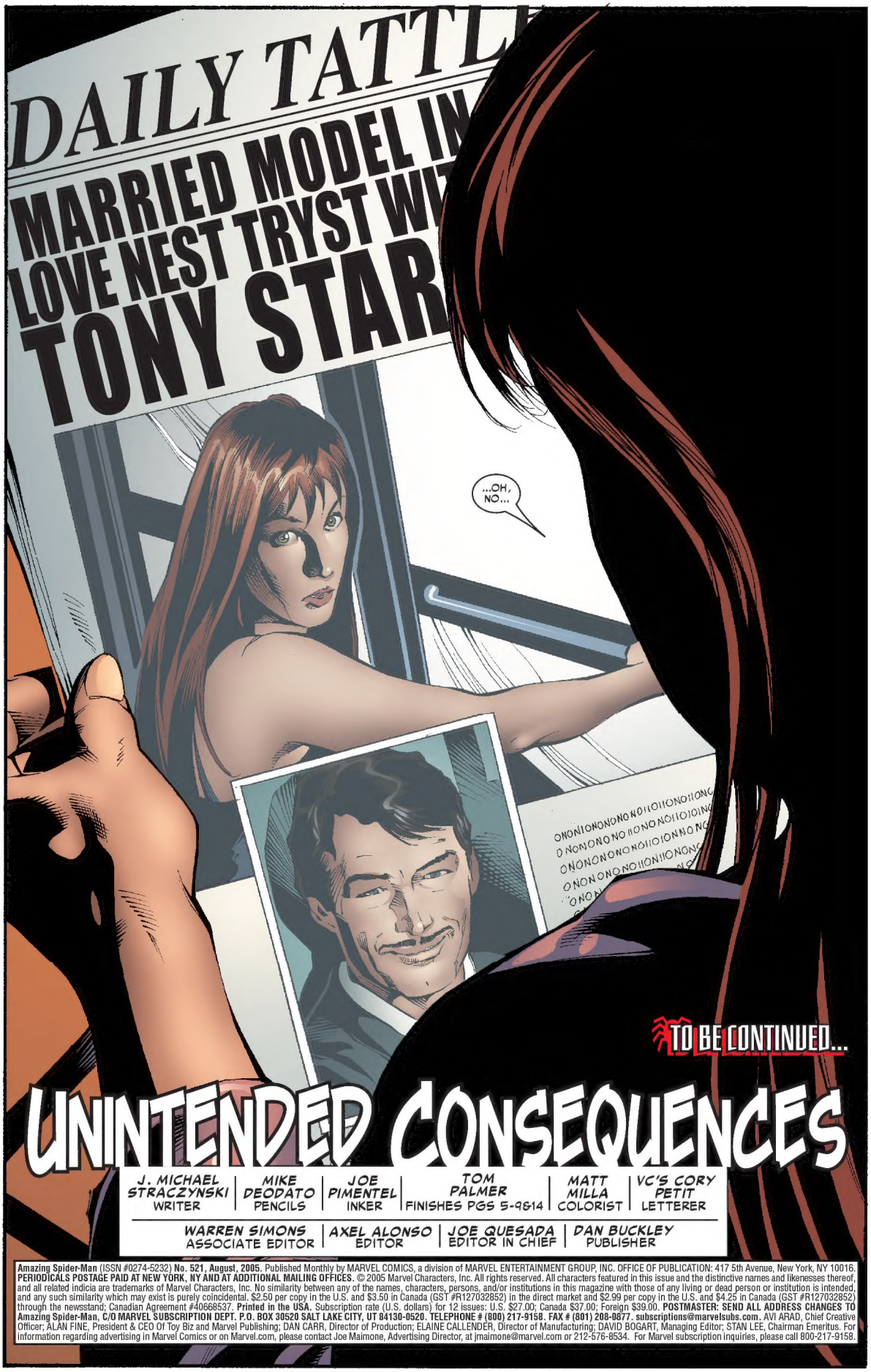
OKAY, G'NIGHT, MJ.
I LOVE YOU.

LOOKING FOR THIS, SWEET-CHEEKS?

I...IS THAT--
YEP.


MUST'VE BEEN ONE HECK OF A NIGHT, ALL RIGHT.





UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES

J. MICHAEL STRACZYNSKI — WRITER | MIKE DEODATO — PENCILS | JOE PIMENTEL — INKER | TOM PALMER — FINISHES PGS 5-9&14 | MATT MILLA — COLORIST | VC'S CORY PETIT — LETTERER

WARREN SIMONS — ASSOCIATE EDITOR | AXEL ALONSO — EDITOR | JOE QUESADA — EDITOR IN CHIEF | DAN BUCKLEY — PUBLISHER

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